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for educational research in its best sense will facilitate the introduction of such a procedure as I have outlined. But even without these agencies some progress along the lines suggested can be made through the co-operation of the city schools and the college classes when the teachers in charge of the special teachers' courses are convinced that the best way to train teachers is through participation.

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### RELATIVE VALUE OF FRENCH VERB TENSES

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*By JAMES F. BROUSSARD*

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THE greatest cause of our ineffective results in verb teaching is our continued determination not to accept and recognize the relative values of the different tenses. Verb drills, as generally conducted, take in the following tenses on the same basis of importance: Present, Imperfect, Future, Conditional, Past Definite, Present Subjunctive, Imperfect Subjunctive, and the compound tenses, Past Indefinite, Pluperfect, Past Anterior, Future Perfect, Conditional Perfect, Conditional Anterior, Past Subjunctive, and Pluperfect Subjunctive—a grand total of sixteen tenses!

As a matter of fact, the educated Frenchman uses in his conversation only the following tenses: Present, Imperfect, Future, Conditional, Past Indefinite, Present Subjunctive, Imperative, and the compounds Pluperfect, Future Perfect, Conditional Perfect, and Perfect Subjunctive. Eleven tenses! And of these eleven tenses, five are used more than ten times to once for the others. And we drill our students from the beginning in sixteen!

It is an accepted fact that the Past Definite, the Imperfect Subjunctive, the Past Anterior, and the Conditional Anterior are dead tenses in spoken French. Purists occasionally revive the Past Definite and the Imperfect Subjunctive; others, burdened with a grammatical conscience, use them occasionally, generally with an apologetic nod or a smile expressive of a duty seen and performed. But the average educated Frenchman converses freely and unhampered without them.

In substantiation of the above statement, I submit the following experiment conducted a few years ago in Paris. During two months' conversation at lunch and dinner with three cultured students, all native Parisians, with a surreptitious pad and pencil always at hand, I jotted down three uses of the Imperfect Subjunctive (one with an apology and the other two with an evident determination to carry out an intricate tense sequence), and not a single use of the Past Definite, Past Anterior, Conditional Anterior, or Pluperfect Subjunctive. Further, in a faculty of twelve French-speaking professors, during conversations carried throughout one academic year, I have heard one professor use the Past Definite and the Imperfect Subjunctive intermittently. From the eleven others, I jotted down five uses of the Imperfect Subjunctive, two of which were used in jest.

In other words, we find ourselves drilling our students in five tenses that are dead to all practical purposes!

"But these tenses are the tenses of literature," observe those of us who are bound by tradition. "Students must know them in order to read French."

Every one will agree to that. These tenses, however, should be taught as passive, not active vocabulary. And even then the emphasis should be laid only on the Past Definite, the past tense of literature, and the Imperfect Subjunctive. I have read a whole *Figaro Illustré* without finding a single Past Anterior, a Conditional Anterior, or a Pluperfect Subjunctive. I read four of Daudet's stories before coming to my first Imperfect Subjunctive! I venture the statement that these so-called tenses of literature, except the Past Definite and the Imperfect Subjunctive, will average about one to every five pages of literature. The literary tenses should be taught visually. I have yet to find the student, well-drilled in the Past Indefinite and the Present Subjunctive, who will find any difficulty in recognizing the Past Definite and the Imperfect Subjunctive.

I submit the following observations on the matter of verb presentation and on the emphasis to be laid on the different tenses.

Most verb manuals try to include every known verb. Most verb drills follow the manuals blindly. Whether this is due to an unconscious desire for variety, or timidity in selecting, is hard to determine. Nevertheless, it is painfully true that students are

compelled often to labor over many verbs that they will never have occasion to use in speaking French. The point naturally comes up again that these verbs form a part of the passive vocabulary, that students in reading French will run across them in their irregular forms and will not be able to recognize them. This point I answer by asking the question, "Do we not teach vocabulary by selecting at first common words?" What is done for the vocabulary can be done for verbs. The teaching of French would be a woeful task if we had to teach our students all the uncommon words in the language for fear that they might run across some of them in reading and not be able to understand them. I grant that a certain number of verbs not in the active vocabulary should be taught. But they should be taught passively (by verb blanks, if you will), in just the same manner that the literary tenses of common verbs should be taught. The time used in the oral drill of uncommon verbs is time wasted—time that can be most valuably employed in drilling the important tenses of common verbs.

I return now to the matter of the relative importance of the different tenses. In another experiment covering five conversations averaging an hour, I found (eliminating the present indicative forms of *avoir* and *être* which predominate over all other verb forms) the following ratio:

Detached Conversation (about past events)

Past Indefinite.....	150
Imperfect.....	50
Pluperfect, Present, and Conditional....	10
Present Subjunctive.....	5
Other tenses, fewer than.....	5

In a related conversation (descriptive of one past event), the Imperfect and the Past Indefinite were reversed. Three Imperfects were used to one Past Indefinite, for obvious reasons.

In detached conversation, not relating to past events, I found the following ratio:

Present Indicative.....	150
Past Indefinite.....	75
Imperfect.....	50
Future and Pluperfect.....	25
Imperative (exclamations).....	10
Present Subjunctive.....	10
Other tenses, fewer than.....	4

In comparing these figures with written French, I find that there is very little variation. Examining Daudet's "La Dernière Classe" and "Le Siège de Berlin," two classics for descriptive French, I found the following:

	La Dernière Classe	Le Siège de Berlin
Imperfect.....	82	105
Past Definite.....	39	49
Present.....	29	25

Other tenses, except Pluperfect, fewer than six.

In order to test Daudet's style, I studied Mérimée's "L'Enlèvement de la Redoute," a style not so descriptive as Daudet's, I found the following:

Past Definite.....	310
Imperfect.....	64
Present.....	28
Other tenses, fewer than.....	5

In the first ten scenes of "Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon," one of the best specimens of live, detached conversation, I found:

Present.....	90
Past Indefinite.....	39
Imperfect.....	36
Future.....	22
All other tenses, except exclamatory imperatives, fewer than.....	5

In other words, the tenses into which *eighty per cent* of our thoughts are projected are the Present, Imperfect, the Past Indefinite (the Past Definite for literature), and the Future. The rest of our thoughts find expression in the other tenses (eliminating the Imperfect Subjunctive, the Past and Conditional Anteriors, and the Pluperfect Subjunctive for spoken French).

It would seem logical, then, that if we are aiming to give to the student a "speaking" knowledge of a verb, we should devote a large majority of our time to the four tenses mentioned. It would be absurd to infer that the other tenses should be neglected. The Present Subjunctive, Pluperfect, Future Perfect, Conditional Perfect, Imperative (taught easily along with the Present), and the Perfect Subjunctive come next in the order of importance and should be taught with the four tenses. I claim, however, that the

time devoted to these tenses should be relative. The drills should be relative. The amount of practice and accuracy required should be relative. In other words, it is far more important to teach a student the correct use of the Imperfect than of the Subjunctive; and yet I have known classes who could carry out intricate subjunctive sequences but who put every verb in a past tense in the Imperfect.

Another point about verb presentation. A verb should be presented as a living thing, not a dead word to be inflected according to rules. For example, we should present "dire" not as "dire, to say," as most manuals and grammars have it, but in a sentence like "Il faut *dire à Jean de venir*." The reason is obvious. The student on seeing "dire, to say" immediately transposes into his English "dire" with all the functions of "to say" and carries the mental transposition in his mind to the class-room. When asked to write a sentence with "dire," the result is almost invariably "J'ai dit le garçon à venir," or something else equally incorrect. The teacher then has to take time to explain that "dire" takes the preposition "à" before the indirect object and "de" before the verb object; and the student has to combat a previous wrong impression and readjust "dire" in his mind. And so with all the verbs that present grammatical differences between the French and English equivalents. Students constantly groan over the difficulty of using the right preposition, if any, with the verb. Obviate that trouble to some extent by giving the right preposition with the verb. We are now teaching gender largely by agglutinating the article with the noun upon first presentation. Why not follow a similar procedure for the verb?

Again, in presenting verbs, the student should be drilled not only in the primary meaning of the verb, but also in whatever constructions that express the equivalents for common or for idiomatic expressions in English. For instance, the verb "vouloir" is given in an excellent grammar as "vouloir, to will." "To will," besides being a rather vague verb in the average mind, certainly does not do justice to "vouloir," when we remember that it is not only the verb for "to want," but expresses in French our very common expressions "I'd like," "Would you care to," etc.

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